

An Interview with Mandy Deans

Events Manager: Warbirds Over Wanaka

Mandy Deans is the Warbirds Over Wanaka Airshow Events Manager. The 2012 show was her second since she took on what she describes as an amazing job in 2008. Mandy has a background in business development, events, marketing and management. She is a lapsed pilot having flown Cherokees and Cessnas. When asked what her dream aircraft would be she responded, 'My own jetpack.'

JILL McCaw spoke to Mandy after the airshow this year to get an idea of what is involved in putting together the largest event of its kind in the country and to find out what motivates the woman who runs it.

I'm guessing that once you've recovered from some sort of post-show breakdown you're already underway on planning for the next one.

Yes. It takes several months to clean up the airfield, pay the bills, collate the feedback, sort the book and DVD orders, write the thank you letters and do the reporting. We are shortly setting ticket prices for 2014 because we then have to

have our marketing collateral printed for the airshows that we attend during next year to promote WOW 2014.

Do you have some sort of a timeline for planning?

Yes, we use Project software with each item carefully planned. Flexibility is the key however as so many things change in the planning process. For example there are always some aircraft that are suddenly not available. Planning starts with those items that can be determined early – a website upgrade, marketing plan, ground exhibit possibilities, and things like that.

How big is the formal team involved?

There are the Event Manager and part-time CEO, then we gather our volunteer Organising Committee together which consists of six to ten people. They in turn, have their own teams of volunteers that come on board during the airshow year.

Are the authorities generally helpful?

In the main, yes.



Mandy Deans

The local community is firmly behind the show.

Yes, airshow patrons put in around \$10m to the Wanaka economy alone each airshow. Roughly \$20m flows into the region with another \$5m into NZ generally.

I know there are plenty of businesses pleased about all the visitors in town. How many community groups have an involvement in the show itself?

It varies, between 5 and 10 each time. We have put \$120k into community groups over the 2010/2012 airshows for services they provide us, such as programme selling, car parking, aircraft parking, selling merchandise, and more.

There were a fair few 'conspiracy theories' on the crowd line about why the RAAF were not at the show. What was the true story?

We had invited the RAAF about a year before the airshow and knew they would probably come out for the RNZAF 75th celebrations at Ohakea. We never confirmed their attendance at WOW but naturally hoped they would be here. They would have had to stay in NZ for the week between Ohakea and our airshow and logistically it was feasible for them. It was confirmed they wouldn't be coming to us in the weeks leading up to the airshow – the same thing can happen (as it did to the RNZAF Hercules) to any aircraft scheduled from the services. We can have a no-show due to service problems or being called away to some scenario in another part of the world. This also applies to civilian aircraft. As airshow organisers we have to be ready to plug the gaps if an aircraft is suddenly unavailable. Our Display Planner, John Lamont, is an expert at re-jigging the programme on the day, if required.

How much work goes into tracking down potential new exhibitors or are people always offering to be part of it?

This too varies with each airshow. If we have a theme for some of the ground exhibits such as 'Ford through the ages', then quite a lot. Food and other service providers normally come to us.

The Air Force display this year was great. How supportive are they?

Very. We have a great relationship with the RNZAF who provide us with as many aircraft and personnel as they can for each airshow.

Is there anything else that you feel needs mentioning to give readers an idea of what you do?

Yes! We have over 300 volunteers working at the airshow – sourcing them, trying to fit their skills to the jobs, briefing them, feeding them and de-briefing many of them is a major task. We have office volunteers still coming in for 1 day a week after 4 years and we simply couldn't run the airshow without them. They are the reason we can hold airshows and we owe them all many thanks.

What was your personal favourite/s this year?

For me it's the Corsair. The total package of noise, grunt, ability and grace says it all!

What was the final figure on crowd size?

We didn't do an economic impact assessment this year but numbers were about the same as 2010 which was between 60,000 and 65,000.

Have you been for rides in any of the aircraft?

Only the Mustang and Tiger Moth thus far. Hopefully there will be more opportunities in the future.

Wanaka is a great place to live, but it can be quite isolated. Are you enjoying living there?

Personally I don't feel it's isolated. There are great flights in and out, and it's an easy drive to Dunedin or the West Coast. It's longer to Christchurch but we regularly drive up there as our families live there. I fell in love with Wanaka when I was 10 and have been coming back for both skiing and summer holidays ever since. After 41 years I made it back for good and I'll be going out feet first. I've travelled a lot and had the choice of where I lived in the world. In 2006, Wanaka won hands down!

Have you got the best job in the world then?

Absolutely. WOW combines many of my passions and to share them with other like-minded people is the best it can get.

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